

T H  
USEFULNESS and IMPORTANCE  
OF  
HUMAN LEARNING,  
S E R M O N

Preached before the  
TRUSTEES of DICKINSON COLLEGE.

Met at Carlisle, May 11, 1786; and published  
at their Desire.

---

By CHARLES NISBET, D. D. Principal of said College.

---

" Doctrina sed vim promovet infitam,

" Rectique cultus pectora roborant."

HOR.

---

C A R L I S L E:  
Printed by KLINE & REYNOLDS.

DC  
D

N 723u

At a Meeting of the BOARD of TRUSTEES of  
DICKINSON COLLEGE, 11th May, 1786,

Resolved unanimously,

**T**HAT the Thanks of this Board be presented to the  
Rev. Dr. NISBET, the Principal of this College,  
for his Sermon delivered before the Trustees, Faculty and  
Students this day; and that Mr. King and Mr. Smith be a  
Committee to wait on the Doctor with this Address of  
Thanks, and to Request him to furnish the Board with  
a Copy in Order for Publication.

Extract from the Minutes,

THOMAS DUNCAN, Sec'y.



The USEFULNESS and IMPORTANCE  
OF HUMAN LEARNING.

---

ACTS vii, 22. *And Moses was learned in all the Wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in Words and Deeds.*

THE character, the history, the works and writings of Moses, occupy a distinguished place in the sacred volume. Remarkable from his birth for his wonderful preservation, and adoption by the daughter of the king of Egypt; afterwards for his sympathy and concern for his suffering brethren, and at last chosen of God to be their deliverer from slavery; we see united in his character the hero, the patriot and the legislator of a great people; the favorite of God, and the friend of men. In contemplating the lives of illustrious persons, we are apt to be dazzled with the splendor of their external actions, and ready to imagine that they must have been more than other men who performed them, while we do not attend to the secret causes and previous means by which they were prepared and enabled to perform

perform them. But St. Stephen, in our text, reciting to his countrymen the history of Moses, whom they highly respected, amidst the singular honours and wonderful gifts conferred on him by his Creator, disdains not to mention the human learning which he had received in the schools of Egypt, as one of those means whereby he was prepared to act the distinguished part to which he was destined by Divine Providence. Although God condescended to speak with Moses face to face, as a man speaketh to his friend, altho' he was endowed with the spirit of prophecy and the gift of working miracles; yet his human learning is mentioned by the inspired martyr, as a necessary & notable ingredient in his exalted character. Moses was born in a nation of slaves, whose minds were depressed by hard bondage; and the low nature of those labours which their cruel task-masters imposed on them, seems to have destroyed their courage, and rendered them unconscious and insensible of the value of liberty, so that they were contented to continue slaves, with all their posterity, provided only that they had the ordinary supports of life. If Moses had been brought up in this manner; if he had had only the low education and confined ideas of a slave, he could not have had any sense of the value of liberty, nor conceive the least notion of public spirit;



spirit; and consequently would have been an unfit instrument for instructing and delivering his countrymen. It is true that God might have inspired Moses with every kind of wisdom in an extraordinary manner, without the use of outward means; but altho' he can work miracles when he pleases, he never works them in vain, or in cases where ordinary means may serve the same purpose. It pleased God to rescue his chosen servant from the meanness of a slavish education, and to place him in such circumstances, that in a natural way, and by the use of common means, he might acquire a proper dignity of sentiment, the knowledge of men and things, a sense of the value of liberty, and of the necessity of regular government, and the various other accomplishments necessary for the legislator and conductor of a mighty people. And by this he has given a lesson to all ages, to teach us the usefulness of human learning; and how necessary it is that those should cultivate the powers of their mind who are destined to the important offices of government and legislation. For if Moses who was endowed with inspiration, stood in need of human learning for that purpose, it must be infinitely more necessary for us in these latter ages, when the gifts of prophecy and miracles are no longer indulged to men.

In discoursing further on this subject, it is proposed 1st. more generally, to shew the usefulness of human learning. 2dly. to point out in particular its tendency to form good citizens, and to qualify youth for the most eminent stations in society, keeping in view the example of Moses, and the benefits he derived from the wisdom of the Egyptians; and in the last place to make a few inferences from the doctrine delivered.

The first thing proposed is to shew the usefulness of human learning in general.--- And this may appear, 1st, from that enlargement and ready exercise of the powers of the mind which it produces. No man is born learned, any more than he is born tall, strong or dexterous in the exercises of the body. All our powers are at first only weak, latent capacities, to be developed and improved by the course of time and application. The instinct of nature, and the necessities of life, excite us to the exercise of our bodily powers; but no more of our mental faculties are thereby excited, than such as are barely sufficient for the support and defence of the body: hence the rude form, and imperfect acquisitions of savage life, and the infant state of society and the useful arts among them. A savage may be endowed by nature with as large a portion of intellectual capacity as the most accomplished



plished and lettered sage; but for the want of exercise and occasions of excitement, it languishes in obscurity and inaction, and remains equally unknown and useless to himself and others.

Education, by calling the mind into exercise, discovers its formerly unknown powers, and excites its dormant capacities to lively action. Hence habits of thinking are produced, and the soul, now conscious of its powers, is led to exercise them on a great variety of objects: the field of imagination and reflection is vastly enlarged, and the mind profits the more by its new acquisitions, that the faculty of thinking is capable of incessant exercise. The powers of the body, being weak and limited, cannot be excited beyond a certain degree, otherwise weariness, disease and death must be the consequence; but the powers of the mind are of an unknown range and compass: instead of being wearied, they acquire vigor and increase by proper excitement and exercise, and are capable of infinitely greater improvement and variety than those of the body. The power of thinking, like all others, becomes stronger by exercise; and as in mechanics, it is experience, practice and application that lead to improvement and excellence, so in thinking, those who have been most employed in study, and the exercise of  
their

their mental powers, must necessarily be more expert, ingenious and discerning than others. The human faculties, when confined within too narrow a sphere, as must be the case when not excited and enlarged by education, find no opportunity of exertion, and languish for want of exercise, so that they remain useless to the possessor and to the public: but learning and philosophy, by leading the mind to reflection, make it acquainted with itself and its own powers, with its nature, situation, dignity and interest, as well as with the nature of surrounding objects, their relation to man, and their fitness for exciting his capacities and promoting his happiness. And how useful these acquisitions are for the conduct, improvement and embellishment of human life, we need not spend time to prove.

2d. The usefulness of human learning will further appear, if we consider that insatiable and strong desire of knowledge which is implanted in the human mind by its great Creator. God has been pleased to furnish every creature with those instincts and propensities which he knew to be useful for promoting their happiness, and from his having given this desire of knowledge in so great a degree to men, we may fairly infer its usefulness. God does nothing in vain. He has made knowledge agreeable to the human



human soul, as light is to the eye of the body. Knowledge is the food and the delight of the mind; and altho' that desire or curiosity which leads to the acquisition of knowledge is at first dormant, and scarcely discernible; although in many it is stifled by other more powerful propensities, and like a musical ear, must be excited by external causes circumstances; yet when once properly excited, it gradually gathers strength, and becomes a powerful principle of action. The pursuit of knowledge itself, independent of the usefulness and excellence of those objects with which it makes us acquainted, forms an agreeable and enchanting exercise to the human faculties, which to some has such charms, as to lead them to relinquish all other pursuits on this account. Through desire, says Solomon, a man having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom. Thus the love of knowledge often becomes a counterpoise to the love of vice; and amidst the temptations of an evil world, affords an occupation to the human faculties, at once suitable to their dignity, and tending to their improvement.

3dly. The usefulness of human learning may appear from the help it affords to morals. Philosophy is never more properly and worthily employed, than when it is applied to the discovery of our moral nature, and

the great end of our creation; and the knowledge which it affords us of the dignity of the human soul, our relation to the Deity, and our duty resulting from that relation, may be considered as luminous proofs of its usefulness and excellence. To the crude thoughts of simple and unlettered men, mankind appear as so many loose, independent & unconnected individuals, having each a separate interest, and naturally disposed to make war with one another. Such inaccurate views tend to nourish a selfish spirit, a neglect of the duties of society, & a total indifference for the public. But philosophy leads our thoughts to a common origin and brotherhood, explains the nature & progress of society, and the advantages of association and concord among men, the sacred relation constituted by marriage, the charities of kindred, the relation and duties of parents and children, the sweets of friendship, the benefits of peace, and the strength & security which every individual derives from the protection of society. It likewise discloses to us the mischiefs of discord & the indulgence of the unsocial passions, that benevolence which we owe to all who partake of the same nature with ourselves, the excellence and necessity of the virtues of justice, meekness, compassion and social affection, which form the cement of all well-ordered communities of men.



men. Thus the very subjects with which philosophy is chiefly conversant, are so many proofs of its usefulness, and its tendency to improve the human character, and to promote the happiness of mankind.

4thly. The usefulness of human learning will further appear from its bringing us acquainted with many illustrious and exemplary characters, and putting us in possession of the collected wisdom and experience of past ages. The short term and limited situation of human life, confines the wisdom and experience of each individual within very narrow bounds. Few are so situated as to be acquainted with many illustrious characters, or to have an opportunity of acquiring worthy sentiments or useful knowledge from their acquaintance ; besides that the greatest part of human life is past in those common and ordinary actions, which scarcely distinguish one man from another. But while philosophy unveils the principles, nature and tendency of human actions, history draws back the curtain that conceals the great theatre of the world, and discloses to us in their due succession and proper dimensions the illustrious dead of all former ages, makes us acquainted with their characters, manners, situations and transactions, their wisdom, their virtues and their weaknesses, so that the astonished student becomes as it  
were

were cotemporary with all ages, a citizen of all countries, and personally acquainted with the most distinguished of the human species: he sees empires rise and fall before him; he discerns the most important events in their springs and causes; he sees arts sometimes encouraged and protected, sometimes extinguished and swept away by returning barbarity; he traces the origin of science and of the various forms of government; he discerns those virtues that constitute and preserve the happiness of society; and those vices which always tend to, and often produce its dissolution; and with a shorter experience of the miseries of human life, he acquires as much wisdom as probably he would have acquired, had he lived from the beginning of the world to the present time. The power of example in forming and assimilating the characters of men, is universally acknowledged to be superior to that of precept; and the man who sees nothing to admire and imitate in the illustrious examples and accumulated wisdom of past ages recorded in history, must either be very proud, or very dull. In society it is ordinary for men to resemble the company they keep, and the characters which they approve. "He that walketh with wise men, shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." And although human history



tory consists, in a great measure, in a relation of the vices and follies of men ; yet in every age we may find some worthy and exalted characters, whose virtues are rendered more illustrious by the corruption of the times wherein they lived. It is certainly fit & useful that youth should be made acquainted with these examples, from the imitation of which they may derive signal profit ; nor will the knowledge of vicious characters be wholly useless to them : they may learn to despise their baseness, now no longer concealed by the splendor of their condition, and to take warning from their errors, when they consider the deserved infamy with which most of their characters are covered, and transmitted to posterity. The characters of the living are commonly obscured by slander and envy, or lessened by some of those weaknesses that are inseparable from human nature, so that whatever excellence they may possess, they are always seen to disadvantage : but envy has nothing to do with the dead, and time conceals their weakness, so that they appear in a more favourable and engaging light than if we were perfectly acquainted with them.

5thly. Human learning is useful, on account of its subserviency to religion. The divine attributes are made manifest by the works of nature, which it is the business of philosophy

philosophy to survey, and the knowledge it affords us of the greatness and immensity of the universe, and of the inconceivable wisdom, power and goodness displayed in its formation and preservation, while they silence the Atheist, they lead the devout to just notions of their own dependant state, and reverent apprehensions of the great object of all adoration. Perhaps the most beneficial discovery afforded us by philosophy, is that of its own weakness and insufficiency; but a slight acquaintance with it will not lead to this discovery. Philosophy knows nothing of creation or the beginning of things; is often at a loss to reconcile the events of Providence to the attributes of the Deity, and is utterly unable to inform us how our evil passions may be conquered, how a just God can pardon sinners, or how these can be made good who are accustomed to do evil. It is true that philosophy offers prescriptions for removing our moral disorders; but alas! experience discovers their futility and want of efficacy. To contemplate the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice, to meditate on the dignity of human nature, and to struggle against our natural inclinations, are weak & ineffectual remedies for creatures under the influence of corrupt nature, passion and habit, and consequently incapable of using these  
remedies



remedies properly, if they were of any real utility. The doubts and darkness into which philosophy leads us in many subjects, afford us useful lessons of humility, and dispose us to receive with gratitude the light of divine revelation. The man who imagines that every thing is discoverable and resolvable by reason, is not sufficiently acquainted with its powers and extent. "A little learning is a dangerous thing" In the present age there is a general diffusion and communication of knowledge, in some degree, to every rank in civilized countries; but as real learning can not be acquired without pain and application, the far greater part content themselves with a little smattering of it, and a few general indigested notions, of which they are exceedingly proud, and fond of displaying their little stores. Hence we ought to trace the progress of pert and disputatious infidelity, which is so rampant in the present age. It is probable that there are but few systematic and determined Infidels, who having examined with some attention the proofs of Christianity, think them insufficient to command their assent. The most of our modern Infidels are made without study or meditation of any kind, and generally have very little reading, except perhaps a few scraps from Voltaire, or some other of the patriarchs of infidelity. But almost all of them  
are

are totally unacquainted with the Christian system, which they pretend to confute, as well as with that philosophy which they ignorantly imagine to be on their side. By the help of a few cant words, such as priestcraft, superstition, credulity, right reason and true philosophy, which they have either borrowed from books or received by tradition, accompanied by a great deal of oaths, and such ribaldry and effrontery as sound philosophy disdains, they impudently impose their foolish opinions upon the young and inattentive, while they laugh at all who believe any others except themselves. Many young and untaught persons, by keeping bad company, and addicting themselves to fashionable vices, endeavour to defend their conduct, and to silence the reproaches of their conscience by assuming the profession of infidelity, though ignorant of the arguments it usually adopts: some make the same profession from the love of singularity, or in order to appear wiser than others, whence we often find the sacred truths of Christianity ridiculed by men who know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm, while they assume the air of profound philosophers, and boast of having overcome the prejudices of their education. Stupified by the amusements of a thoughtless life, and puffed up by the praises of those who know



know as little as themselves, they presume to decide the most abstruse and difficult questions in the midst of riot and intemperance ; they think they are possessed of true wisdom, and look down with contempt, from their imaginary height, upon the thoughtful and religious part of mankind. While such odious and futile characters abound, nothing can be more necessary for youth than the study of true philosophy, which will effectually guard them against being seduced by these superficial talkers, and enable them to encounter the enemies of religion, on that ground which they so much vaunt, and with which they think they are acquainted; and to convince them, if they are willing to be convinced, that philosophy can not resolve every difficulty, nor remove all the evils of our nature ; and that the Christian faith which they ignorantly despise, has not only miracles and prophecies, but reason and argument on its side.

The second thing we proposed was to point out in particular the necessity and usefulness of human learning to societies, and its tendency to form good citizens, from the example of Moses, and the benefit he derived from the wisdom of the Egyptians.--- Indeed every thing we have said already may be considered as an argument in favour of this assertion, as wise and well instructed individuals



dividuals compose the greatest strength of the states to which they belong, and from having cultivated their minds and enlarged their experience by study, are incomparably the best qualified for the intricate business of government and legislation, if their countrymen are wise enough to call them into office. Without wise and virtuous men in the offices of administration, no state can preserve its reputation abroad, nor its order, prosperity and existence at home. Men of weak understandings and confined ideas can neither uniformly discover, nor steadily attend to the public interest. Wrapt up in their own concerns, destitute of experience, and fond of their "little brief authority," they cannot be expected to have proper notions of honour and justice, or of the sanctity of public and private faith, and may sometimes by a stretch of power enact laws to stop the course of justice, to encroach on the rights of property, and to render the public faith uncertain and insignificant, while their numbers render them incapable of blushing for the iniquity they have established by law.--- Nothing can be more pernicious and disgraceful to a state, than such men and such measures. And here I cannot forbear mentioning with the most sincere approbation, the seventh article of the constitution of this state, by which it is provided that "the  
house



house of representatives of the freemen of this commonwealth, shall consist of persons most noted for wisdom and virtue." If this article of the constitution is strictly adhered to, we need not be apprehensive that any such disorders will ever take place in this state. But, to proceed.

Moses was destined by Providence to be a ruler and a judge to God's chosen people; and the more that his faculties were exercised, and his ideas and experience enlarged by study, he would be better acquainted with human nature, and more fit for his exalted station, and for bearing, directing and governing the humours and passions of men, while he led them invariably to their true interest. And it appears that God designed that he should have these advantages, by placing him in a station where he had the best opportunities which the world then afforded for acquiring them.

It is difficult indeed, at this distance of time, to give a particular account of the Egyptian learning in which Moses was instructed; one circumstance especially contributes to increase this difficulty. The Egyptians, though a learned, yet were not a lettered nation; and in the time of Moses were utter strangers to alphabetical writing. Their learning therefore must have been merely traditionary, and preserved only in the memories



mories of their priests, like that of the Druids of ancient Gaul and Britain. Letters were not invented early enough to preserve the Egyptian learning, so that the original monuments of it are lost many ages ago. Besides, perhaps to conceal the scantiness of their stores, they affected to make a great mystery of their learning, communicating it only to particular persons, with great chariness and circumspection. Had not Moses been in favour at court, as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, he would not have been initiated in the mysteries of Egyptian wisdom. In a later age a Greek philosopher, travelling into Egypt, needed the recommendation of a sovereign prince, in order to be admitted to this privilege.

On these accounts we should at this day have been wholly ignorant of the learning of ancient Egypt, were it not from the hints thrown out in the sacred history, and the diligence and curiosity of a few Greeks, particularly Plato, Iamblichus, Diodorus Siculus and Philo Byblius whose fragments have been preserved by Eusebius. Some tracts of Plutarch have likewise preserved a few traditions.

From these we learn that Egypt was the native country of geometry and mathematics, which the particular circumstances of that country rendered very necessary. It was the principal



principal mart of knowledge resorted to by the oldest of the Greek philosophers, before their vanity had persuaded them that they could invent every thing of themselves, and Thales one of the seven sages, brought from Egypt the first sun dial that was seen in Europe; from which circumstance, and their accurate computation of the length of the year, it appears that they were not ignorant of the principles of astronomy; nay Pythagoras is said to have learned in Egypt what is now called the Copernican system.

That natural philosophy was well understood among them is evident from the flourishing state of the mechanic arts, which is evinced by monuments still extant. The construction of their pyramids, temples and obelisks, with some specimens of ancient painting and gilding yet to be seen in that country, but especially their art of embalming dead bodies so as to preserve them incorrupted for the space of three thousand years, are signal proofs of this fact; and the wonderful works of their magicians or jugglers, related in sacred history, prove that they were possessed of secrets which have not descended to succeeding ages. It is likewise probable that Bezaleel and Aholiab, whose ingenuity adorned the tabernacle of God, tho' it is said that they were filled with wisdom by the spirit of God, learned the first rudiments of their skill under Egyptian artists.



Their embalming led them to some knowledge of anatomy and phyfic ; and we are told that they had particular physicians for every disease known among them ; nor were they ignorant of the philosophy of the mind, being among the first who asserted the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments, of which doctrine they made great use in their civil policy.

It is easy to show that these sciences into which Moses was initiated in Egypt must have greatly contributed to elevate, exercise and enlarge his mind ; but what particularly distinguished the antient Egyptians ; and from which perhaps Moses profited more than from all the rest, was their arts of government and legislation ; and although under this head the most of their institutions are totally unknown, yet the certain effects of them narrated in history, are truly astonishing. The orderly form of society among them, the improvement of the arts, the exactness of their police, the riches of their country, the security of life and property, and the ready obedience and happiness of the people, are so many signal proofs of the excellence of their political institutions, and accordingly attracted the admiration of other nations, even after they were not a little degenerated from their antient customs.



customs. Perhaps it was chiefly in the article of policy and civil wisdom that Moses was indebted to the Egyptian learning, as though he received his laws immediately from the Deity, yet in his ordinary behaviour as a ruler, and in the promulgation, execution and application of them, he was left to the dictates of political prudence and experience. Although the Egyptians had slaves whom they treated with rigor, as all masters of slaves do more or less, yet the natives were governed by fixed laws, which guarded their lives and properties, and even humanised the unrelenting spirit of monarchy. When Moses had slain an Egyptian, though he was in high favour at court, he was obliged to abandon Egypt, having reason to dread the wrath of the king and the vengeance of the laws, which he would have had no reason to dread, had he lived under some modern princes and states. The government of Egypt indeed was monarchical, but their laws appear to have been wise and impartial, and the priests who possessed the power of judicature, seem to have contributed to balance the royal authority in favour of public justice and the private happiness of the subjects. Moreover, being possessed of independent fortunes, and monopolising almost all the learning of their times, it appears that they were greatly respected  
both

both by the sovereign and the people; so that Joseph, a minister introduced and appointed by the crown, was obliged to ally himself to the priesthood, in order to render his administration more respectable and agreeable to the people.

So habituated were the Egyptians to order and regularity, and so much were they convinced of the benefits of peace and concord, that when Jacob and his family were brought into the land of Goshen, till then unoccupied, we do not find that it excited the least murmur or jealousy among the natives, nor that any of them pretended to have prior grants to the lands occupied by the house of Israel. And in the time of seven years of famine, we read not of the least tumult or disorder on that account; though under the boasted policy of Rome, both in the times of the republic and the emperors, we read of frequent disorders on occasion of scarcity, though for much shorter periods. Nay when Joseph had bought the whole land for Pharaoh, and, in order to establish a settled revenue, had granted it back to the subjects on new terms; when he transported the natives from the one end of the kingdom to the other, they patiently submitted, from a regard to justice, and a conviction of the validity of the resignation they had made of their lands into the hands  
of



of the king, in return for his supporting them during the famine.

It is true that this degree of obedience may be thought slavish, but it proves that they had been long habituated to order, and convinced of the benefits of regular government, else they would not have carried their obedience on this occasion, to an excess. God, in ordering the affairs of the world, has shewn more regard to the order and general peace of society, and the preservation of justice, than to the liberty of states and individuals. Liberty is a blessing which has always been bestowed with a sparing hand and for short periods, on the children of men; and no wonder, because it requires wisdom, a gift still more rare, to manage it to advantage. Those who are favoured with this precious gift, ought certainly to shew their thankfulness to God for it, by a humble, just, regular and religious life, and to ask of him that wisdom which is necessary to render their liberty a blessing, and particularly to chuse such men to the offices of government as possess a sense of honour and a love of justice, who know the use, as well as the value of liberty, and who consider the interest of the state as inseparably connected with public faith, the sacred obligation of contracts, and the rights of property. But to return, Moses being well ac-

D

acquainted

quainted with human nature, and initiated in the political wisdom of Egypt, was therefore a proper person to manage a large society, and to lead them to their duty by convincing them that it was their interest. Hence he is said to have been mighty in words and in deeds, by which it is not meant that he was an artificial rhetorician, as we are assured that he was destitute of a graceful pronunciation, which is one of the principal charms of that art. But he was a rational and wise philosopher, who had learned to think with propriety, perspicuity and dignity, and to support his arguments with the strength of reason. Words are only the copies of the thoughts, made sensible to the ear, and by that means conveyed to the minds of others. Although the grandeur and propriety of the thoughts of Moses excited the admiration even of heathen criticks, he never affected the artificial ornaments of rhetoric. Even his poetry is beautifully simple, though truly sublime. Moses was not a noisy and superficial talker, without knowledge of business or capacity for action, but he had learned to act as well as to speak with propriety, without which his speeches would have been of small advantage to his character, or to the public. The Grecian hero in Homer gives us a brief description of a good education, when he tells us that his tutor taught



taught him to imitate the best examples, to study to excel others, to be a speaker of speeches and a doer of deeds. To think, to speak and act with propriety and dignity, comprises all the wisdom of which man is capable; and this we are assured that Moses learned in part from the wisdom of the Egyptians. And even the disciples of our blessed Saviour, the perfection of whose nature rendered instruction superfluous to him, in describing his character, could say nothing more honourable of him than that he was a prophet mighty in deed and word, before God and all the people. The acquired wisdom of Moses was profitable to the public, as well as honourable to himself: he thought, spoke and acted for the welfare of men, and the benefits which his countrymen derived from his administration are so many proofs how useful human learning is to society, and how much it is for the interest of states to have their legislators and rulers properly instructed and qualified for their offices as he was. We shall conclude with a few inferences.

1st. From what has been said we ought to learn not to despise human learning as if it were an useless and idle amusement, & of no importance to society. The contrary, we think, has been made abundantly evident from the example before us. Some smatterers,

terers, truants from school, or imperfectly instructed, affect to treat it as entirely useless; but no man who has a tolerable acquaintance with it can think meanly of its importance. It is with a bad grace that the ignorant rail against what they do not understand. Wisdom is justified of her children, and those who have not been conversant with it, have no right to pronounce any judgment concerning it. It is true that learning can not work miracles, and that there have been learned men of trifling, ridiculous, and even abominable characters, but this is not owing to their learning, but to the original wickedness and vices of their mind, which no philosophy can entirely subdue.

2d. From what has been said we may see the tendency of learning to make good citizens. and the obligation that all states are under, to support and promote it. Some will say that they destine their children for humble and ordinary stations, such as learning is not thought necessary to adorn: but in a popular government who can say what persons may or may not be chosen members of the legislature, and entrusted with the interests of the public? And how unfortunate must that state be, that is governed by ignorant, mean and selfish men! In a republic the advantages of learning ought to be diffused as far as possible, that wherever the  
the



the public choice may light, there may be some probability that the person chosen, may be in some measure qualified for public trust. We mean not to derogate from the merit of plain sense and unlettered wisdom; but though some, by the goodness of nature, and the improvement of intelligent company, or private study, may have been beneficial to the public, without the advantage of human learning, yet such instances are rare, and such persons would have been still more useful if they had been learned: besides, persons of this sort are never enemies to learning, but commonly its greatest friends and admirers. Learning is certainly the surest and most direct way of being prepared for doing the duties of good citizens, and especially for the offices of government and legislation, for discharging which knowledge and experience are essentially requisite.

3dly. From what has been said, let us learn not to overvalue human learning, or to imagine that it is sufficient to lead us to true felicity. Learning carries us a little way, with much pleasure, and tolerable evidence, it leads to great advantages, and preserves from many errors, but it falls short of leading us to eternal happiness. This is the office of revealed religion, which will be valued by every man who possesses true learning.

Socrates,

Socrates, with whom none of our modern infidels are worthy to be named, spoke of divine revelation with reverence, and supposing it indulged to man, declared that it ought to be received with gratitude and veneration. But our minute philosophers, without having studied human nature, or read the bible with attention, treat the doctrines of revelation, which they have never examined, with a disdainful smile. The man who is proud of his knowledge, evidently shews that he has got little to be proud of. A little knowledge puffeth up, but true learning and philosophy which teach us to contemplate God in his works, lead its possessors to humility and devotion. When the Psalmist had considered the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars that he had ordained, he cried out, " Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou visitest him!

4thly. From what has been said let the youth of this seminary be excited to diligence and application to the study of learning, and for this purpose, to think justly of its dignity, its usefulness, and its tendency to make good citizens. Perhaps some of you may not yet be duly apprised of the importance of your present studies, and their influence on your future usefulness and welfare, but  
in



in proportion as you advance in learning, and your knowledge of things is enlarged, you will be more sensible of the advantages of a liberal education, and of its tendency to qualify you for every station to which your country may call you. And although in the present course of things "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor favour to men of skill, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, but time and chance happeneth to all," yet we may assure you that you will never have cause to repent of your application to your studies; and if you should not be called to places of trust and importance, you will have the consolation to think, and perhaps to convince others, that you have deserved them. Learning is no less fit to administer consolation, and to afford resources to the mind in adversity, than to adorn prosperity. Cultivate the powers of your minds, and apply yourselves to the knowledge of men and things, as if you knew for certain that the most distinguished stations and places in the state were reserved for you. Remember that in every kind of business it is the hand of the diligent that maketh rich. Your being well educated will be so far from hindering your advancement in the world, that if your countrymen are wise, it will mark you out for their choice, and qualify you to discharge



discharge the trust reposed in you, with honour and advantage. Consider that on your present behaviour your future consequence and usefulness necessarily depend. If Moses needed diligent application to various studies, and it appears by his ready calcination of the golden calf, that he had not neglected any part of them, though he had the gift of prophecy and working miracles; diligence must be much more necessary for you, who have no reason to expect supernatural gifts. Your parents expect that you will be diligent, and much of their happiness depends on your success and good conduct. "A wise son maketh a glad father, but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother." May God Almighty incline your minds to the love and study of true wisdom, and turn all our labours to your benefit and that of the public, that you may be qualified to fulfil and adorn every station, and may, like Moses, be mighty in words and in deeds.

F I N I S.